

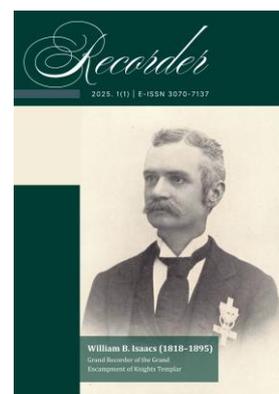
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### Leafing Through Antique Books

## Thomas Smith Webb ‘The Freemasons Monitor of Illustration of Masonry’. Chapters I–V

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**Abstract.** This section presents a rare bibliographic artifact connected to Thomas Smith Webb (1771–1819), one of the most influential figures in American Freemasonry and the Knights Templar. Webb served as the first Deputy Grand Master of the General Grand Encampment from 1816 until his death in 1819. His most significant contribution was *The Freemason’s Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry* (1797), a work that profoundly shaped the ritual and structure of the York Rite in the United States. During Webb’s lifetime, the book underwent five revisions, with the 1816 edition now considered a valuable rarity. This section presents selected excerpts from chapters I–V of this historic volume.

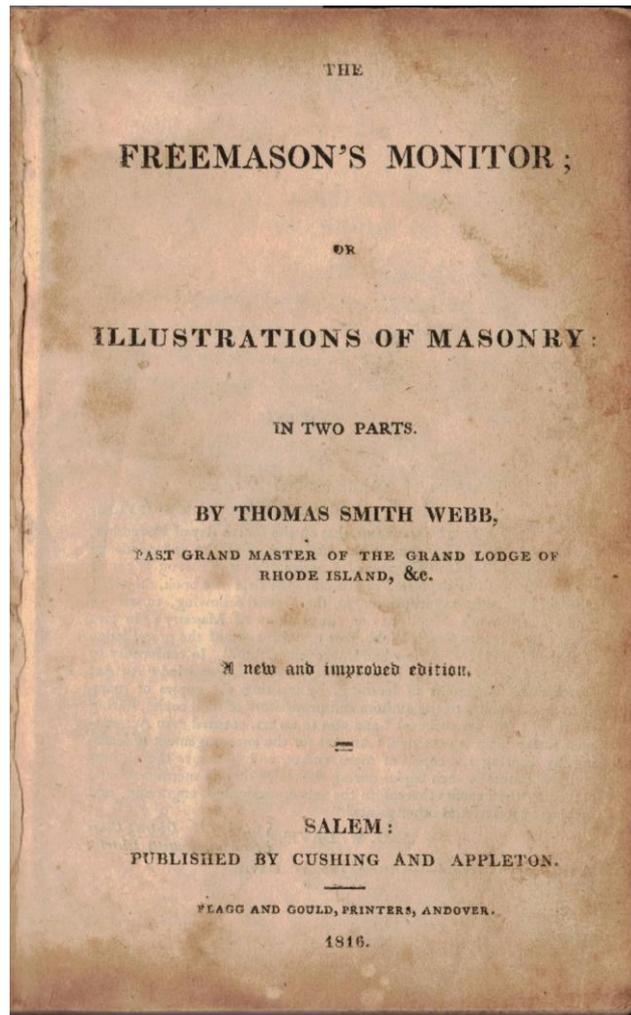
**Keywords:** Thomas Smith Webb (1771–1819), Freemasonry, Knights Templar, York Rite, Masonic literature, 1816 edition, ‘The Freemasons Monitor of Illustration of Masonry’.



Thomas Smith Webb (1771–1819) — a prominent Freemason and Knight Templar. In 1816, he became the first Deputy Grand Master of the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar in the USA, a position he held until his death in 1819.

In 1797, Thomas Smith Webb published the principal work of his life — “*The Freemason’s Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry*.” This book had a profound influence on the development of Masonic ritual in America, particularly within the York Rite.

During the author’s lifetime, the book was revised and expanded five times. The penultimate edition, published in 1816, is now considered a bibliographic rarity. We present to the reader selected excerpts from this remarkable volume (chapters I–V).



THE FREEMASON'S MONITOR

PART FIRST

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Origin of Masonry, and its general advantages.

From the commencement of the world, we may trace the foundation of Masonry<sup>1</sup>. Ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms, our order has had a being. During many ages, and in many different countries, it has flourished. In the dark periods of antiquity, when literature was in a low state, and the rude manners of our forefathers withheld from them that knowledge we now so amply share, masonry diffused its influence. This science unveiled, arts arose, civilization took place, and the progress of knowledge and philosophy gradually dispelled the gloom of ignorance and barbarism. Government being settled, authority was given to laws, and the assemblies of the fraternity acquired the patronage of the great and the good, while the tenets of the profession were attended with unbounded utility.

Masonry is a science confined to no particular country, but diffused over the whole terrestrial globe. Wherever arts flourish, there it flourishes too. Add to this, that by secret and inviolable signs, carefully preserved among the fraternity throughout the world, masonry becomes an universal language. Hence many advantages are gained: the distant Chinese, the wild Arab, and the American savage, will embrace a brother

<sup>1</sup> Masonry and Geometry are sometimes used as synonymus terms.

Briton, Franc, or German; and will know, that beside the common ties of humanity, there is still a stronger obligation to induce him to kind and friendly offices. The spirit of the fulminating priest will be tamed; and a moral brother, though of a different persuasion, engage his esteem. Thus, through the influence of masonry, which is reconcileable to the best policy, all those disputes, which embitter life, and sour the tempers of men, are avoided: while the common good, the general design of the craft, is zealously pursued.

From this view of the system, its utility must be sufficiently obvious. The universal principles of the art unite men of the most opposite tenets, of the most distant countries, and of the most contradictory opinions, in one indissoluble bond of affection, so that in every nation a mason finds a friend, and in every climate a home.

## CHAPTER II

### The Government of the Fraternity explained.

The mode of government observed by the fraternity will best explain the importance, and give the truest idea of the nature and design, of the masonic system.

There are several classes of masons, under different appellations. The privileges of these classes are distinct, and particular means are adopted to preserve those privileges to the just and meritorious of each class.

Honour and probity are recommendations to the first class; in which the practice of virtue is enforced, and the duties of morality inculcated, while the mind is prepared for regular and social converse, in the principles of knowledge and philosophy.

Diligence, assiduity and application, are qualifications for the second class; in which an accurate elucidation of science, both in theory and practice, is given. Here human reason is cultivated by a due exertion of the rational and intellectual powers and faculties; nice and difficult theories are explained; new discoveries produced, and those already known beautifully embellished.

The third class is composed of those whom truth and fidelity have distinguished; who, when assaulted by threats and violence, after solicitation and persuasion have failed, have evinced their firmness and integrity in preserving inviolate the mysteries of the order.

The fourth class consists of those who have perseveringly studied the scientific branches of the art, and exhibited proofs of their skill and acquirements, and who have consequently obtained the honour of this degree, as a reward of merit.

The fifth class consists of those who, having acquired a proficiency of knowledge to become teachers, have been elected to preside over regularly constituted bodies of masons.

The sixth class consists of those who, having discharged the duties of the chair with honour and reputation, are acknowledged and recorded as excellent masters.

The seventh class consists of a select few whom years and experience have improved, and whom merit and abilities have entitled to preferment. With this class the ancient landmarks of the order are preserved; and from them we learn and practise the necessary and instructive lessons, which at once dignify the art, and qualify its professors to illustrate its excellence and utility.

This is the established mode of the masonic government, when the rules of the system are observed. By this judicious arrangement, true friendship is cultivated among different ranks and degrees of men, hospitality promoted, industry rewarded, and ingenuity encouraged.

## CHAPTER III

### The Importance of the Secrets of Masonry demonstrated.

If the secrets of masonry are replete with such advantages to mankind, it may be asked, Why are they not divulged for the general good of society? To which it may be answered; Were the privileges of masonry to be indiscriminately bestowed, the design of the institution would be subverted; and, being familiar, like many other important matters, would soon lose their value, and sink into disregard.

It is a weakness in human nature, that men are generally more charmed with novelty, than the real worth or intrinsic value of things. Novelty influences all our actions and determinations. What is new, or difficult in the acquisition, however trifling or insignificant, readily captivates the imagination, and ensures a temporary admiration; while what is familiar, or easily obtained, however noble and eminent for its utility, is sure to be disregarded by the giddy and unthinking.

Did the particular secrets or peculiar forms prevalent among masons constitute the essence of the art, it might be alleged that our amusements were trifling, and our ceremonies superficial. But this is not the case. Having their use, they are preserved; and from the recollection of the lessons they inculcate, the well informed mason derives instruction. Drawing them to a near inspection, he views them through a proper medium; adverts to the circumstances which gave them rise; dwells upon the tenets they convey; and, finding them replete with useful information, adopts them as keys to the privileges of his art, and prizes them as sacred. Thus convinced of their propriety, he estimates the value from their utility.

Many persons are deluded by their vague supposition that our mysteries are merely nominal; that the practices established among us are frivolous; and that our ceremonies might be adopted, or waived, at pleasure. On this false foundation, we have found them hurrying through all the degrees, without adverting to the propriety of one step they pursue, or possessing a single qualification requisite for advancement. Passing through the usual formalities, they have accepted offices, and assumed the government of lodges, equally unacquainted with the rules of the institution they pretended to support, or the nature of the trust reposed in them. The consequence is obvious; wherever such practices have been allowed, anarchy and confusion have ensued, and the substance has been lost in the shadow. Were the brethren, who preside over lodges, properly instructed previous to their appointment, and regularly apprised of the importance of their respective offices, a general reformation would speedily take place. This would evince the propriety of our mode of government, and lead men to acknowledge, that our honours were deservedly conferred.

Such conduct alone can support our character. Unless prudent actions shall distinguish our title to the honours of masonry, and regular deportment display the influence and utility of our rules, the world in general will not easily be led to reconcile our proceedings with the tenets of our profession.

#### CHAP. IV

##### General Remarks.

Masonry is an art equally useful and extensive. In every art there is a mystery, which requires a gradual progression of knowledge to arrive at any degree of perfection in it. Without much instruction, and more exercise, no man can be skilful in any art; in like manner, without an assiduous application to the various subjects treated of in the different lectures of masonry, no person can be sufficiently acquainted with its true value.

It must not, however, be inferred from this remark, that persons, who labour under the disadvantages of a confined education, or whose sphere of life requires a more intense application to business or study, are to be discouraged in their endeavours to gain a knowledge of masonry.

To qualify an individual to enjoy the benefits of the society at large, or to partake of its privileges, it is not absolutely necessary that he should be acquainted with all the intricate parts of the science. These are only intended for the diligent and assiduous mason, who may have leisure and opportunity to indulge such pursuits.

Though some are more able than others, some more eminent, some more useful, yet all, in their different spheres, may prove advantageous to the community. As the nature of every man's profession will not admit of that leisure which is necessary to qualify him to become an expert mason, it is highly proper that the official duties of a lodge should be executed by persons whose education and situation in life enable them to become adepts; as it must be allowed, that all, who accept offices and exercise authority, should be properly qualified to discharge the task assigned them, with honour to themselves, and credit to their sundry stations.

#### CHAPTER V

##### The ceremony of opening and closing a lodge.

In all regular assemblies of men, who are convened for wise and useful purposes, the commencement and conclusion of business are accompanied with some form. In every country of the world the practice prevails, and is deemed essential. From the most remote periods of antiquity it may be traced, and the refined improvements of modern times have not totally abolished it.

Ceremonies, when simply considered, it is true, are little more than visionary delusions; but their effects are sometimes important. When they impress awe and reverence on the mind, and engage the attention by external attraction, to solemn rites, they are interesting objects. These purposes are effected by judicious ceremonies, when regularly conducted and properly arranged. On this ground they have received the sanction of the wisest men in all ages, and consequently could not escape the notice of masons. To begin well

is the most likely means to end well; and it is judiciously remarked, that when order and method are neglected at the beginning, they will be seldom found to take place at the end.

The ceremony of opening and closing a lodge with solemnity and decorum, is therefore universally admitted among masons; and though the mode in some lodges may vary, and in every degree must vary, still an uniformity in the general practice prevails in every lodge; and the variation (if any) is solely occasioned by want of method, which a little application might easily remove.

To conduct this ceremony with propriety ought to be the peculiar study of every mason; especially of those who have the honour to rule in our assemblies. To persons who are thus dignified, every eye is naturally directed for propriety of conduct and behaviour; and from them, other brethren, who are less informed, will naturally expect to derive an example worthy of imitation.

From a share in this ceremony no mason can be exempted. It is a general concern, in which all must assist. This is the first request of the master, and the prelude to all business. No sooner has it been signified, than every officer repairs to his station, and the brethren rank according to their degrees. The intent of the meeting becomes the sole object of attention, and the mind is insensibly drawn from those indiscriminate subjects of conversation, which are apt to intrude on our less serious moments.

This effect accomplished, our care is directed to the external avenues of the lodge, and the proper officers, whose province it is to discharge that duty, execute their trust with fidelity, and by certain mystic forms, of no recent date, intimate that we may safely proceed. To detect impostors among ourselves, an adherence to order in the character of masons ensues, and the lodge is either opened or closed in solemn form.

At opening the lodge, two purposes are wisely affected: the master is reminded of the dignity of his character, and the brethren, of the homage and veneration due from them in their sundry stations. These are not the only advantages resulting from a due observance of this ceremony; a reverential awe for the Deity is inculcated, and the eye fixed on that object from whose radiant beams light only can be derived. Here we are taught to adore the God of heaven, and to supplicate his protection on our well meant endeavours. The master assumes his government in due form, and under him his wardens; who accept their trust, after the customary salutations. The brethren then, with one accord, unite in duty and respect, and the ceremony concludes.

At closing the lodge, a similar form takes place. Here the less important duties of masonry are not passed over unobserved. The necessary degree of subordination in the government of a lodge is peculiarly marked, while the proper tribute of gratitude is offered up to the beneficent Author of life, and his blessing invoked and extended to the whole fraternity. Each brother faithfully locks up the treasure he has acquired, in his own secret repository; and, pleased with his reward, retires to enjoy and disseminate among the private circle of his brethren, the fruits of his labour and industry in the lodge.

These are faint outlines of a ceremony, which universally prevails among masons in every country, and distinguishes all their meetings. It is arranged as a general section in every degree, and takes the lead in all out illustration.

#### Charge used at opening a lodge.

Behold! how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment:

As the dew of Hermon, that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded a blessing, even life for evermore.

#### A prayer used at closing the lodge.

May the blessing of Heaven rest upon us, and all regular masons!

May brotherly love prevail, and every moral and social virtue cement us!

Amen.

**Resurse:** *Webb T.S.* (1816). *The Freemasons Monitor of Illustration of Masonry*. In two parts. Salem: Published by Cushing and Appleton. P. 13-24.